

The Friends of Old St. Thomas at Ivy Mills

Newsletter

Volume 22, No. 1
e-mail: fost@friendsofoldstthomas.org

Spring/Summer 2015
www.friendsofoldstthomas.org

Unanswered Questions

Who actually built the church? Where is the actual cornerstone blessed by Saint John Neumann? Was the steeple installed at the same time (1860) as the bell? Who actually did that and how?

All parish stories are important and worthy because every parish, whenever it began, nurtured people and their Catholic faith. Learning what that meant for individuals, families and local communities enriches everyone's appreciation of God's plan. The story of this parish of St Thomas at Ivy Mills is noteworthy because of its formative role in religious freedom in Pennsylvania and the nation, and because of its almost 300 years of faithful service to parishioners, surrounding communities, and eventually, the Archdiocese.

Since FOST (the Friends of Old Saint Thomas) was formed in 1991, we've learned a great deal, but we have many unanswered questions, some more important than others.

More mysteries:

What is the origin of the Tiffany-like decorative inlay on the Blessed Mother's altar? Why and when was the marble backing removed from the two side altars? What became of the large oil painting of the Agony in the Garden that hung behind the altar until the mid-1970s? What happened to the two wooden confessionals from the rear of the church (removed in the late 1970s or early 1980s to allow for more standing room at Sunday Masses)? Who made the elaborate vestment case in the sacristy?

What happened to the large statue of the Blessed Mother that stood in the back cemetery (St. Mary's Cemetery)? Why are so many names listed on one large grave marker in St. Thomas Cemetery?

When did the parish first begin to use electricity for lighting the church and the rectory?

Are there biographies for our pastors? We have their names, but who were they? Where did they come from?

How many parishioners have gone on to become priests or entered religious life, and who are they?

Do the records of the Altar Society and the Holy Name Society still exist? Were there any other clubs? Were there youth groups before the school opened? We know Sisters of St Francis came from Aston to teach youngsters their Baltimore Catechism in the 1920s and 1930s. Who were they and who were their students? How often did they come? Were there adult education classes? What happened to the parish library?

FOST exists to foster the awareness and understanding of the parish story, and does so in several ways: preserving and maintaining the 1852 church, the historic outbuildings, and the landscape; collecting relevant artifacts, books, documents, & photos; a newsletter and website; public tours and educational programs for students. Research, finding answers to questions, is at the heart of what we do.

Can anyone answer any of these questions? Are there any parish families who might discover troves of old Bulletins, Fair memorabilia, school activities or other parish printed items, or related photos in attics, basements, or back closets? If so, would those families be willing to share them with us?

Ivy Mills – Saint Thomas Tours

Free guided tours are offered at the St. Thomas Historic District & Ivy Mills on the 4th Sunday of the month, from 1 to 4pm (last tour is 3:45) on June 28, July 26, Aug.23, Oct. 25. Due to the World Meeting of Families the Sept. 27 tour time may change. Check the FOST web site for Sept. 27 information.

Memorial Day Mass on the Steps

Father Francis Groarke, Pastor, will celebrate Mass on the steps of the 1852 Church on Monday, May 25, 2015, at 9 AM. FOST will offer coffee and doughnuts after the Mass. All are invited.

**“They Used These:
Sacramentals from Early Ivy Mills”**

Stop in to see the new exhibit this summer. In conjunction with the FOST tours, an exhibit of historical artifacts will be installed in the 1874 Rectory Conference Room. It will feature the original tabernacle, candle holders, confessionals and other items used at Ivy Mills long before the 1852 church was built. Some of the items are on loan to FOST from the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center.

*Thank You!
To the following for their financial
support from
April 16, 2014 through April 15, 2015.*

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Signing Up

- For donations of \$10.00 or more individuals and groups may enroll the name of living or deceased persons in the Old St. Thomas Honor/Memorial Book. The Friends will notify a designated recipient by mail.
- Donations of \$1000 or more are recognized on the donor plaque in the old church. Donations may be cumulative.

JOIN OR DONATE by US Mail or online at

www.friendsofoldstthomas.org

**The Friends of Old Saint Thomas
PO Box 19, Chester Heights, PA 19017**

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My gift of \$ _____

Receipt to be sent to donor:

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Thank you!

The Friends of Old Saint Thomas at Ivy Mills

NEWSLETTER

Volume 22, No. 2
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Fall/Winter 2015/2016
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Saint Charles Seminary and Ivy Mills

Because Saint Thomas' founding family was here at Ivy Mills so early (1720s), they were bound to be connected to the developing Catholic community throughout southeastern Pennsylvania, including bishops, priests, laity, and the institutions which supported the church. One such institution is St. Charles Seminary, located in Wynnwood since 1871. It is the official educational institution for priests of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and is of primary importance to all Catholics here.

In September 2015, St. Charles was in the news when it hosted Pope Francis during his Philadelphia visit after the World Meeting of Families. 2015 was not the first time the Vicar of Christ had come. Pope John Paul II came in 1979 for the World Eucharistic Congress. As Cardinal Wojtyla, he also visited in 1969 and in 1976. Three other Cardinals who later became Pope also walked the campus: Cardinal Pacelli (Pius XII) came in 1936, Cardinal Montini (Paul VI) in 1960, and Cardinal Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) in 1990. St. Charles is known in Rome as an important place! Ivy Mills enjoyed some early connections with it.

St. Charles was founded in 1832, more than 100 years after Catholics had settled in Concord, by the urbane and accomplished Bishop Francis P. Kenrick. A Dublin native educated in Rome, he volunteered for missionary work in the U.S. after ordination in 1821. He was sent to Bardstown, Kentucky (near Louisville), where he made great strides in parish work and earned respect from Protestants whose distrust of the Catholic church was well known.

Kenrick's success there led to his elevation as the third Bishop of Philadelphia in 1830, and he recognized the urgent need for native-born priests, trained in the US. Thus, he began teaching candidates for the priesthood in his own home in 1832. Seven years later he ordained the first Philadelphia-born seminarian, Daniel Devitt, who served Ivy Mills for a time in the 1840s.

Bishop Kenrick himself came to Ivy Mills in 1842 to confirm "about thirty" persons. On display there is one of the written permissions in his handwriting, dated 1848, for Mass to be celebrated in St. Mary's chapel at Ivy Mills. Another, dated 1851, after he had become Archbishop of Baltimore, reaffirms the permission "in consideration of the exemplary piety of the family".

At least some of Kenrick's appreciation of the Willcoxes was surely due to their welcoming him during the massively destructive and hateful anti-Catholic riots in Philadelphia in June 1844. Numerous persons on both sides of the conflict were killed; the rioters burned two city churches and the seminary. Word was that one of their targets was Bishop Kenrick himself. Warned of the danger, he disguised himself as a Quaker and made his way to safety in tolerant Concord. He stayed at Ivy Mills for two nights, then travelled to Baltimore until it was safe to return.

Another close connection between the seminary and Ivy Mills was that seminarians visited annually on summer vacation. From 1842 to 1854, they escaped city heat through the generous hospitality of James M. and Mary Brackett Willcox. Mary Brackett was especially solicitous of the young men; some became lasting friends who continued their Ivy Mills connection through letters to and from her as they went on to their priestly assignments in the city and throughout the U.S.

The Willcox Chalice

It was long thought that Thomas Willcox himself brought from England the chalice used by priests at Ivy Mills, including Father Greaton, S.J., pioneer missionary in Philadelphia. Indeed, it was known by some as the "Greaton Chalice". Alas, close scrutiny of the chalice proves otherwise. It bears the mark of an official assay office in England that began operating in 1773, twenty years after Father Greaton's death.

Storm Damage

The violent storm last June caused considerable damage to trees of the St. Thomas Historic District but none to the 1852 church or the 1874 rectory. A large branch landed on the roof of the horse shed. The cost of those repairs is expected to be covered by parish insurance. Eight trees were removed to forestall future damage.

FOST Notes

- Our sincerest apologies to *Mr. and Mrs. James J. Murphy* who have been loyal donors to FOST for many years, but whose names were inadvertently omitted from the donor list last Spring. *Thank you!*
- Thank you, too, to *The Country Press* in Lima, which has provided printing services to FOST since our start in 1991. We appreciate their outstanding service and continuing support!
- Since the installation of the new heating/air conditioning system in the 1852 Church two years ago, more than two dozen marriages have been celebrated there. FOST wedding coordinators assist the entire process, helping to ensure that all goes smoothly. Our dedicated Bell Ringers add a special dimension to the wedding as they ring the 1860 bell at the conclusion of the ceremony.

- On Saturday, October 31, FOST hosted a Volunteers Appreciation Breakfast in the 1874 Rectory to thank those who assist FOST activities. Monthly meeting attendance is not necessary. Call Bette Popiel at 610-358-4835 or e-mail FOST at fost@friendsofoldstthomas.org to learn more.

Your Support

*Memberships and the Honor and Memorial Program are prime sources of income for the Friends. **Join or donate by US Mail or on-line.***

www.friendsofoldstthomas.org

For donations of \$10.00 or more individuals and groups may enroll the name of living or deceased persons in the Old St. Thomas Honor/Memorial Book. The Friends will notify a designated recipient by mail.

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The Friends of Old Saint Thomas
PO Box 19, Chester Heights, PA 19017
*Checks payable, please, to FOST
Or Friends of Old St. Thomas*

Honor/Memorial Program

Please enroll

Name _____

Living _____ Deceased _____

My Gift of \$ _____

Receipt to be sent to you:

Name _____

Address _____

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